

CASE HISTORY 7

OHIO VALLEY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY: INTRODUCTION TO KEYBOARDING & BUSINESS WRITING, INTRODUCTION TO COMPUTERS

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There are several interesting aspects to this case history. Given his mix of students, Mr. Grimes took a stealth approach to the gamer language employed in the multiplayer classroom by downplaying lingo and concentrating on motivation (see Figure CH7.1). His thoughts on intrinsic motivation, especially the idea of giving students some control over their fate by allowing them to choose crafting activities, helped clarify my thinking.

His experience presenting “World of Classroomcraft” at a conference in Ohio echoes my own experience in presenting the multiplayer classroom at the Game Education Summit at USC in 2010. Our audiences were as enthusiastic as their ideas were far-ranging and compelling. It was at that Game Education Summit where two instructors from a technical school in Texas told me that they were desperate to motivate students to come to class at all. After designing their coursework as a game, one of them said, “Now they’re all coming to class. Early.”



Figure CH7.1
David M. Grimes.

INTRODUCTION

The one thing I really love about “Gaming the Classroom” is that many of the components are already there and already used by teachers. It’s just a matter of stringing different lessons together and changing the lingo.

After watching videos and reading articles on Jesse Schell, Jane McGonigal, and FunTheory, I saw the potential of how students and teachers could get excited, and therefore motivated, when introducing gaming aspects into the classroom. Laying the foundation from Lee Sheldon and his “Gaming the Classroom” website and forum, I was able to put together an implementation plan that best fit my students and their class needs.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Since I have some students who are fresh out of high school and some who haven't been in a classroom in decades, I didn't want to jump full-force into a total gaming inspired classroom. One major idea I borrowed, though, was turning the point totals for class into experience points while introducing the leveling up factor.

Introducing the experience point system proved beneficial because it gave the students a path to accomplish the goal of passing the class. Going from zero points and working toward the top "A" level, students could clearly see where they started and where they needed to end to earn a top grade. By not promoting the everyone-starts-with-an-A approach, it took some pressure off the students to be perfect for my eight-week class.

I think everyone has a fear of failing and students being introduced for the first time in a college setting—whether straight from high school or from the workplace—can alleviate those reservations by knowing they don't have to be perfect day in and day out. They know they can complete assignments, projects, and tests successfully, to move up in the ranks and in the points to their goal grade.

Throughout the course, having an outline of the different levels and experience points also helped the students know where they stood every day in the course. They told me that having the experience point chart in the syllabus on the first day gave them a clear picture of where they were in the class and where they would like to be. It seemed as if it gave a clearer sense of progression through the course. The class wasn't a bunch of days filled with random assignments and tests. It became more of a journey where all the assignments, projects, and tests were intertwined and linked better.

AVATARS

Another aspect that I found beneficial was having everyone create his or her own avatar. Creating an avatar served two purposes: One, it allowed the students to have fun creating their own superhero or fantasy character on the first day. It was a nice exercise to participate in as a welcome exercise. Second, it gave me the opportunity to use those avatars when publically displaying grades,

whether it was on the classroom door or on the classroom walls. The avatars gave everyone a secret identity. The Hero Creator tool was a fun and helpful tool where students could customize their own fantasy character. For the less imaginative students, a random hero chooser allowed the website to pick a hero for them.

CHOICE

Just like in some video games, the students had a choice of assignments to complete. In the various chapters, I always listed more than the required assignments or labs for the students to complete. It was up to them to choose which ones they worked on and finished. This availability of choice is similar to the choices that a player has in a video game. There are different paths to take, but the ultimate goal (earning an A) is still the destination.

By having these extra choices, students could pick which assignments to complete and build their experience points. I found out some students completed all the assignments, wanting to really boost their experience points or “catch up” on some points that were missed on a previous assignment or test. Some students indicated they liked having a choice of the lab activities since it allowed them to pick the ones that appealed to them the most and avoid those that may have been confusing.

LINGO

Although I did not use or stress the actual crafting, quests, guilds, or bosses lingo, I did implement those ideas and made it a point to describe that those exercises were helping the students build their skill level so they would not only pass the test, but also improve their own abilities with the computer program. So when we spent class time finishing Microsoft Word labs, like creating flyers, it was clearly understood the purpose was to develop word processing skills. When we took notes, it was also for the benefit of building upon the skill level. What we were doing was crafting, completing quests, and working in guilds, even though it wasn't explicitly mentioned.

But having the students know the reason why they were taking notes, completing lab assignments, or working on group projects did seem to provide a clearer

picture to answering why we were doing this assignment or that project. Plus, it was all tied to the experience points and that showed progression.

SPREADING THE WORD

After working with these new techniques, I became excited. I wanted to share some of my findings and collaborate with other teachers from elementary, middle, high, and upper education schools. If teachers become excited, it's easy for that enthusiasm to trickle down to the students. And that is a great emotion to have in the classroom.

In the final months of 2010, I applied to speak at the eTech Ohio Conference in Columbus. My topic was "World of Classroomcraft: How You Can Implement Social Gaming in the Classroom to Motivate Students." I wanted to share my experiences and discuss future ideas of expanding the "Gaming in the Classroom" techniques.

eTech Ohio accepted my speaking application and on February 1, 2011, I had a full banquet-style room of about 50 people interested in the topic of turning the classroom into a game.

My 45-minute presentation covered the experience point system, changing the lingo, and intertwining all the lessons and concepts to create a fun atmosphere.

The best part was when attendees submitted their own ideas. For elementary school students, perhaps having a cute monster sticker can help with the whole boss idea. The boss, or test, is trying to slow you down from beating him by giving you this worksheet. It's up to you to beat this worksheet and move closer to defeating the boss. This may help with the game storyline.

Others were optimistic in making an online class website that kept track of experience points. The idea was an online grade book or content management site with the gaming twist. The ideal tool that a teacher mentioned would be an automatic XP counter tool so that teachers could just type in a number, and an XP bar would display the total amount of points.

Then some attendees expressed optimism about gaming in general. One educator believed he could implement the gaming system into his online classroom to boost participation and enthusiasm. Another teacher thought

introducing the gaming aspect could help motivate some of her special needs students as it was something that they were comfortable with and it was something that they already understood or could identify with in their lives.

Throughout the talk, I could see the gears turning. There are probably a lot more ideas that left the room that day or have been developed since eTech Ohio.

I discovered that the gaming concept in the classroom was not only useful but also fun. Students had something different from their traditional classroom settings and by offering experience points, leveling up opportunities, and creating avatars, it all promoted the key intrinsic motivation factor.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

During my research in finding gaming techniques for classroom use and from preparing my eTech Ohio presentation, I came across an online book by Edward Vockell, Ph.D. called, *Educational Psychology: A Practical Approach* (<http://education.calumet.purdue.edu/vockell/edPsybook/>).

In the book, Vockell lists five different factors that encourage intrinsic motivation. These factors are challenge, curiosity, control, competition and cooperation, and recognition. Intrinsic is the key motivation factor that a teacher can help instill in a student.

If a student has intrinsic motivation, it's huge. That student studies because he or she wants to and realizes its importance. That student wants to do well in school, realizing the opportunities of hard work in the classrooms. And that student will read because he or she realizes it is beneficial or even enjoyable when researching or learning about a new topic.

If you take a look at these five factors and then look at Sheldon's gaming concept, you start to see the potential in his methods. Challenge is about setting goals and working toward those goals. So, having the experience point chart, completing quests, and beating bosses all cover the challenges needed. As for curiosity, introducing the gaming concept itself stimulates the learner's interest. When I introduced options and choices for students when choosing their crafting activities and quests, it was to help students feel in control. By giving the students choices, they had more control over their learning or reinforcement on the materials covered in the class.

MINI GAMES

Competition and cooperation fit nicely into the gaming concept. Guilds can work together on group projects and other times, they can battle each other in the classroom. In my courses, I use student response systems, or “clickers,” to test the understanding of certain topics. During these sessions, I will display a top point total leaderboard, only showing the top five or ten to avoid displaying low-scoring students.

After the individual leaderboard, I show the group leaderboard. From implementing this group leaderboard, I have seen students automatically help a puzzled group member and discuss the answers between themselves before submitting a response. In his book, Vockell discusses that learners like to compare themselves, but they also feel good when helping others. Implementing these mini games helped stress the competition and cooperation portion of the intrinsic factors.

Students have really enjoyed the student response systems. It's interactive, and they can work with others. Many students have expressed enjoyment in the clickers. The leaderboards brought the competition out in some students who were otherwise quiet. Students were also teaching others or explaining the answers to fellow students, which not only helped the perplexed student, but also aided in the reinforcement of knowledge in the student offering the assistance.

Personally, another mini game I like is *Ribbon Hero* by Microsoft. Instead of learning different commands in the Microsoft Office Suite, students have to complete challenges. For each challenge, say, by making a bulleted list, they earn achievement points. Even from working in the program on general assignments, they receive achievement points. These points can be posted to Facebook as well, if a student chooses to enable that option. It's a great way to diverge from the traditional lecture and practice routine when working with computer applications.

Lastly, by having experience points and levels, students can receive some sort of recognition, which is the final factor of building intrinsic motivation. Keeping an experience bar meter, congratulating on a character leveling up, or just having the students personally track their progress, offers all kinds of opportunities for recognition.

Perhaps, an XP Hall of Fame, for students who earned the highest XP levels over the years?

Link Box:

Hero Creator: www.ugo.com/games/superhero-generator-heromachine-2-5

Jesse Schell: Design Outside the Box: www.g4tv.com/videos/44277/dice-2010-design-outside-the-box-presentation/

Jane McGonigal: Gaming Can Make a Better World: www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world.html

Fun Theory Projects: www.thefuntheory.com